

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Services
and Research Administration
Washington, DC 20420

CIRCULAR 10-89- 35
April 3, 1989

TO: Regional Directors; Medical District Directors; Directors, VA Medical Center Activities, Domiciliary, Outpatient Clinics, and Regional Offices with Outpatient Clinics

SUBJ: Establishment and Utilization of Addiction Therapist, GS-101 Positions

1. PURPOSE: The purpose of this VHS&RA (Veterans Health Services and Research Administration) Circular is to announce the development in Central Office of an Addiction Therapist, GS-101 position for possible establishment in substance abuse counseling programs, and to provide guidance in the development, classification and staffing of these positions. This material will not be incorporated into a manual issuance.

2. POLICY:

a. A thorough study has been accomplished of the various duties and responsibilities assigned to personnel responsible for counseling substance abuse patients. The study involved site visits and discussions with program officials in the field and Central Office. The findings have revealed that the work accomplished by some of these individuals has evolved significantly, from technician-level interviewing/assessment, practical therapeutic interaction, and conventional referral/follow-up services, to in-depth therapeutic counseling, assessment and treatment planning functions. The kinds of expanded duties observed in the study are delineated in Attachment A. Although the combination of tasks as reflected in the duties statement is not specifically identifiable with an established mental health professional occupation, such as Psychologist or Social Worker, the work assignments are considered to be representative of professional-level work. These duties involve the application of knowledges, skills and abilities associated with series in the behavioral and social sciences. Attachment B reflects the range of knowledges, skills and abilities which were observed to be applied in accomplishing the assignments indicated in Attachment A. We plan to conduct a formal job analysis within the next 12 months, in order to fully substantiate these findings.

b. Based on the above considerations, the GS-101, Social Science Series, has been determined the appropriate series for coverage of addiction therapist positions. Attachment C contains a detailed rationale for the series coverage determination and classification support of a GS-9 full professional level of work.

3. ACTION: Each facility which has identified the need to establish an addiction therapist position(s) is responsible for developing an individualized position description. Attachment A may be used as guidance in the development of local position descriptions. To be classified at the target GS-9, the work must involve the kind of in-depth counseling and have the expected effect suggested in the attached duties statement, as well as the degree of freedom from supervision envisioned. A new title "Addiction Therapist" (PAID title code 0101-11) is to be used as the official classification title for positions

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containing the delegated responsibility and authority. Application of these guidelines to positions comprising significantly more limited assignments and involving commensurately lower qualification requirements is not appropriate. The existing title Rehabilitation Technician (appropriate parenthetical designation), GS-181 is to be utilized for positions which fail to meet the Addiction Therapist criteria.

4. QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS: Applicants for Addiction Therapist positions must be evaluated by reference to the OPM GS-101 Social Science qualification standard. Questions regarding its interpretation should be directed to Peg Durish (054), FTS 373-2057.

5. REFERENCES: None

6. RESCSSIONS: This VHS&RA Circular expires on April 3, 1990.

7. FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITY: Director, Position Management and Classification Service (057).

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Attachments

DISTRIBUTION: COA: (10) only
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ADDICTION THERAPIST, GS-101-9

INTRODUCTION: The position is located in a unit, clinic or service established to treat patients suffering from substance abuse, where patients are referred on a random basis (i.e., the psychiatrist, psychologist or other equivalent professional supervisor does not screen patients before assigning them as cases).

MAJOR DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Receives patients and provides psychological and social assessments as part of the intake of individuals into the substance abuse program;
- Conducts therapeutic short-term, in-depth counseling in accordance with specific guidelines and may occasionally handle crisis intervention or other emergency situations without benefit of specific instructions;
- Prepares written assessments based on knowledge of each patient's background and medical history for use by members of the multidisciplinary treatment team or the therapist's use in developing the appropriate treatment process;
- Serves as a member of the multidisciplinary treatment team (MTT) and works with other professionals to formulate treatment and follow-up plans for each patient assigned;
- Conducts group, family and individual therapeutic counseling sessions; observes patient behaviors and reaction patterns for use by higher level professionals or the MTT in reviewing and modifying treatment and/or follow-up plans;
- Contributes to team decisions concerning necessary controls and restrictions required for the therapeutic progress of both individual patients and the community in general, and recommends degrees of supervision required, including privileges, therapeutic leaves of absence, readiness for job placement, readiness for special education programs, and readiness for discharge.
- Provides consultation to and, where appropriate, leadership of the therapeutic community groups (e.g., decision making, planning and special activity groups).
- Maintains appropriate records, charting information necessary to ensure that they are kept current;
- Trains other therapists and medical personnel in intervention and restraint techniques, crisis oriented counseling, and other germane subjects;

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- Administers psychological tests to patients, observing and recording patient reactions and recommending appropriate treatment modalities;
- Arranges referral of patients to other Federal agencies, State and other public as well as private organizations and gives advice and guidance to patients relative to benefits and services provided within the VA and the local community, along with eligibility requirements;
- Develops and maintains appropriate communications, rapport, and positive working relationships with a variety of institutions, organizations and service providers, e.g., halfway houses, Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Al - Anon, community church groups, etc., and
- Oversees the administering of oral medications (e.g., methadone) used in the treatment of chemically dependent patients and monitors specimen collections.

SUPERVISORY CONTROLS:

Patients are usually assigned on a random basis with little review by the psychiatrist or psychologist in charge. The incumbent works relatively independently within established guides and precedents, but must use caution and care when executing treatment modalities. As unusual, rare or extremely complex cases evolve, they are discussed with the psychiatrist or psychologist in charge before counseling and/or treatment plan is developed. Final case work is reviewed on a random basis for interview techniques, problem identification, counseling approaches, input into the development and/or modification of treatment and/or follow-up plans and written assessments and conclusions, by either a psychologist or a psychiatrist.

ATTACHMENT B

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OTHER SIGNIFICANT FACTORS

Based on the study the following knowledges, skills and abilities were applied by addiction therapists in providing the expanded counseling:

- Knowledge of crisis-oriented counseling, including methods and techniques for restraint of violent patients, triage, and short-term/in-depth counseling;
- Knowledge of the fundamental principles, methods and theories of psychology;
- Knowledge of personality development theories for evaluating behavior and reaction patterns of patients;
- Knowledge of individual and group therapy principles and techniques;
- Knowledge of Federal and applicable State laws regarding use of restraints, involuntary treatment and other similar matters;
- Basic awareness of eligibility requirements for patient services at other Federal agencies, at State or other public and private organizations, in order to make use of such services in treating patients;
- Demonstrated ability to work effectively with difficult, potentially dangerous patients;
- Demonstrated ability to provide psychological and social assessments and develop appropriate treatment plans based on patients' backgrounds and medical histories;
- Ability to administer and score basic assessment instruments, observe and record patient reactions and recommend appropriate changes in the treatment plans based on patient interests, attitudes and aptitudes;
- Demonstrated ability to use sound judgment in applying guides, theories and precedents and a sympathetic insight as well as patience in accommodating the behaviors of others;
- Demonstrated ability to develop realistic, measurable and attainable treatment goals; and,
- Ability to interpret patient physical examination and laboratory test data and consider the results in the development of treatment and/or follow-up plans (in concert with other members of the multidisciplinary team).

CLASSIFICATION GUIDANCE

INTRODUCTION: This position is located in a unit or Service under the direct control of a psychologist or psychiatrist. The primary emphasis of the position is the treatment of patients suffering from substance abuse; secondary problems of a physical nature almost always accompany chemical dependency and must be dealt with during the treatment process. Major responsibilities comprise in-depth counseling which includes testing and provision of therapy services, as well as ensuring that physical health care needs are met. Work of this nature requires knowledge of the basic principles, methods and theories of psychology and social work and the application of in-depth counseling techniques and methodology; it does not require the professional knowledges demanded by the GS-180, Psychology Series, the GS-185, Social Work Series or the GS-1715, Vocational Rehabilitation Series. However, since there are no published Office of Personnel Management (OPM) classification standards specifically covering this type of work, the position may be evaluated by a variety of standards, such as GS-180, Psychology Series; the GS-185, Social Work Series; and the GS-1715, Vocational Rehabilitation Series. An example of such an evaluation follows.

SERIES: As discussed above, the principle assessment, planning and therapeutic counseling duties of the addiction therapist are characteristic of a number of established professional series within the GS-100 Social Science, Psychology, and Welfare Group, but are not specifically covered by or classifiable to any individual occupation. To properly recognize the professional level of work assigned to addiction therapists, we have determined that the mix of duties is appropriately included in the GS-101 series. The GS-101, Social Science Series covers positions the duties of which are professional or scientific and may be individually classified in one or any combination of the behavioral or social science series, when they are not classifiable to an established occupational series in the GS-100 group. Such work requires a background of knowledges, skills and techniques gained from professional training in behavioral or social sciences. OPM has not published classification criterion for the GS-101 series. Therefore, cross-series comparison is appropriate.

TITLE: The title of Addiction Therapist is chosen to immediately identify the paramount purpose for which the position is established, along with the principle function of the organizational entity to which it is assigned.

GRADE: The full performance grade, GS-9, is supported by reference to the GS-180, Psychology Series and the GS-1715, Vocational Rehabilitation Series, as follows. Note that other series, such as the GS-185, Social Work Series and the GS-962, Contact Representative Series may also be useful in evaluating aspects of these positions.

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1. GS-180 - Psychologist - The work of this position requires a comprehensive knowledge of counseling, including crisis oriented counseling, short-term, in-depth counseling, and of the various related maladies suffered by chemically dependent patients. For the most part, the duties require the use of precedents and methods that are already proven. However, this does not mean that the incumbent does not need to know basic principles, methods and theories of psychology and have the ability to exercise good judgment when deviating from well founded practices. (Neither the responsibility nor the final authority vested in the position would support classification in the GS-180 series.)

a. Nature of Assignment - At grade GS-9, assignments are selected to further the professional growth of the psychologist, who has the ultimate responsibility for the treatment of each patient. Psychologists at this grade develop factual data for use by higher grade psychologists or other like professionals, and make preliminary interpretations relative to the validity and significance of the data. Such work includes administering and scoring a wide variety of standardized industrial tests independently, and under close supervision, administering and scoring projective tests. The interpretation of tests is limited to simple cases. Most assignments are governed by specific procedures and techniques, with the degree of supervision being reduced as experience is gained. In any case, there is limited responsibility for the results achieved. In contrast, the Addiction Therapist is assigned cases without prior review of the psychologist or psychiatrist; the employee is expected to develop a written assessment of each patient's needs and administer tests in an effort to develop an appropriate treatment plan, and deliver therapeutic counseling. These functions are accomplished with relative independence; the therapist must exercise good judgment when adjusting procedures, altering treatment processes, and referring patients as their needs become apparent. In some aspects, the nature of the assignment exceeds GS-9. For example, the therapist has more effect on the actual treatment of substance abuse patients, than would a GS-180-9 psychologist. This is due largely to the fact that the therapist has had significantly broader exposure and more focussed experience. However, the ultimate responsibility for the overall treatment of the patient is not totally delegated to the therapist; the psychologist or psychiatrist retains that authority in the capacity of the program director. Consequently, the nature of the therapist work does not exceed GS-9.

b. Level of Responsibility - psychologists at grade GS-9 receive assignments typically with a definition of the problems to be encountered and the objectives to be met. Normally, they are responsible for developing the approach to take in accomplishing each assignment (e.g., procedures, techniques and so forth), and proposing such courses of action to the supervisor for review and discussion. Contacts with other professionals or representatives of other fields of science are for the purpose of discussing cases and exchanging information and opinions. The degree of supervision is reduced as the psychologist becomes acclimated and gains knowledge of accepted

practices, approaches and techniques. In comparison, the therapist functions with relative independence, using acquired knowledge and exposure regarding accepted practices, precedent and techniques. Case files are not reviewed in detail and are relied upon by the multidisciplinary team(s) in the total treatment of each patient. Personal contacts are with other professionals, community officials in halfway houses, long-term rehabilitation centers and other public and private social service organizations. This level of responsibility is typical of grade GS-9. The GS-11 level of responsibility is not met in that therapists' assignments do not have the potential impact of the GS-180 psychologist position. For example, establishment of new treatment techniques, collection and reporting of scientific research data, and other similar outcomes are not involved in this position's assignments.

2. GS-1715 - Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist - The classification standard for the GS-1715 series measures the difficulty of the assignment and the level of responsibility. The standard considers the difficulty of the cases assigned and the degree of knowledge, judgment and originality required to perform the work. Two broad categories of patients (regular procedures and special procedures) are described to reflect major differences in difficulty and types of cases assigned. "Regular procedures" cases are those involving a handicap that does not pose difficult problems insofar as successful training, job placement, and work adjustment are concerned. "Special procedures" cases are those in which the individual is so severely handicapped as to present difficult problems of motivation, training, job placement or work adjustment. The level of responsibility considers the extent of supervisory instruction, guidance and review received, and the extent of independence of action exercised in carrying out assignments.

a. Difficulty of Assignment/Level of Responsibility: According to the standard, GS-9 Vocational Rehabilitation Specialists (VRS) are responsible for completely carrying through assigned cases. Typically the cases are of a regular procedure type and are carried out under general supervision. Such cases require the application of up-to-date occupational information regarding training facilities and general outlook for a wide variety of occupations in the commuting areas; specific job opportunities; entrance-level requirements; and wages, hours of work, and working conditions as related to physical and mental stress. Emphasis in GS-9 assignments is generally on training and fitting handicapped individuals to the requirements of regularly established kinds of work which they can perform despite their handicaps. For most types of cases assigned at this level, established training facilities and institutions previously approved for use in the program are available and adequate for the needs of trainees served by the program. At this level, the employee has the responsibility for counseling an individual while in training and/or during adjustment and otherwise helping the individual resolve personal problems. At this level the employee is required to recognize when an individual needs the help of a more highly skilled person or a different organization and must arrange for appropriate referral.

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b. At grade GS-11, the work involves a wide range of difficult cases involving special procedures (e.g., requires the employer to adapt working conditions or equipment to accommodate persons). The work requires far more initiative, originality and drive. For example, the specialist may have to locate a company suitable for placement of special cases; negotiate adaptation of equipment and working conditions; monitor placement; and, encourage job engineering and other adjustments where necessary. Such work is normally accomplished without supervisory review, and requires application of greater skill and knowledge.

c. Although the addiction therapist position may occasionally deal with situations comparable to those defined at the GS-11 level, the majority of the assignments and the degree of involvement (e.g., originality, ingenuity, etc.) do not appear to match the assignments envisioned at grade GS-11. While contacts with outside sources do occur frequently, the therapist is not required to negotiate or encourage significant changes in the work environment necessary to accommodate recovering substance abuse patients. Except for those individuals for whom placement into the community could pose a serious threat, the majority of the patients treated by the counselor may be characterized as "regular procedure." The "special procedure" patients could be envisioned as those individuals who, in support of costly chemical dependency habits, often revert to such criminal actions as armed robbery. They have criminal records which often create added complexity in placing them in community services or with a private employer. Although the addiction therapist position includes some work that may be classified above GS-9, the more complex cases are rare, and would receive significantly more review by a higher grade professional. Consequently, the difficulty of the majority of the cases assigned and the degree of supervision exercised over the more complex work would not exceed the grade GS-9 characteristics.

3. General - The position evaluation information in the foregoing paragraphs does not represent the only standards that may be used in the evaluation of these positions. However, a review of some of the other comparable standards also substantiates that the complexity of the assignments, degree of supervision, and authority, do not exceed grade GS-9. Questions regarding the classification of these positions should be directed to Herbert H. Souza, Position Management and Classification Service (057), FTS 373-2387 or 2925.